

WHILE THE RIVER WAS HIGH

Had we provided ourselves with the necessary obias with which to travel to the country of the Granman? He had never been so far up the river. He would like to go there. Ai-yo! He would like to go and see Dahomey, the sacred city, and look at the Tapa Wata falls, and visit the Granman's village. Did we have all our paddlers? He was strong, and he liked to make a boat walk up the rapids. He could get his father to come with him as steersman. His father had strong obias and knew the river. We could not go until the river went down, but he would stay with us here and wait, and if we wished it he would go back upstream to his village and get his father and food, and be ready for us in time. He needed the money the Bakra would pay, too, for he wanted to be married soon, and he would have to buy many things for his woman and her mother. 439 789 484

When he left us, he went to one of the little enclosed houses that were there for travelers, choosing the one closest to us, and built a small fire. His younger brother and the white dog that came in his boat sat with him. The dog wore a cord about his neck, covered with red ochre, to keep him safe in the bush. That night as we ate we could see Bayo, his brother, and the dog squatting close to the fire and eating, too. And all the next day, and for several days to come, as we waited, Bayo was with us, talking, laughing, explaining, and making and buying obias for us to carry us safely on our journey to the Granman. [231] •

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In the afternoon one of the political chiefs of the neighboring Christian village came to hear our phonograph. But when we asked him to sing into it, he said, "Ask me later. Now I am alone. We Saramacca people never do anything when we are alone." We had the year before acquired a powerful obia against slander and bearing false witness against us, and found the occasion useful for corroborating the invocation we had been given. The man, however, spoke with the greatest reluctance and looked 609 123

REBEL DESTINY

765 head was clearest in the quiet of the early morning. A stillness so pronounced that we could feel it surrounded us at the base camp, for at Gankwe the drums had been replaced in the shrines of the gods for whom they speak, and no more guns saluted the spirit of Zimbi, or warned away the evil dead with the powder which was distasteful to ghosts. Zimbi was buried, the grave diggers had bathed and put on fresh loin cloths, the village had been purified, and all was still.

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512 From our shelter, watching the haze lift, we could see that the river had fallen; the tangled grasses at the bank showed fully a hand's breadth of fresh brown that had the day before been under water. With the coming of the sun things began to stir. The lizards appeared, the chickens came to peck at our shoes, looking for crumbs, and boats began to make shadows across the opposite bank, as the Gankwe women in their small corials went to their fields. At the bow would be a little girl, or a yet smaller boy—as young as four perhaps, for the older ones went with the men to learn a man's work—helping to take the boat up the fast water. All this went on quietly, until we espied three boats running down the rapids and pivoting about in the still water toward our landing place. As they came nearer, we could see that the boats carried no load, and our host, the director of the balata-collecting station, explained that these boats were new and were being taken down river for sale.

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"All the large boats come from top-side," he said. "The men take them clear around to the Marowynne River by way of the canals and there carry loads in them to the stations in the interior. The Saramacca men are fine canoe-men. They like them on the Marowynne. . . . You could use a large boat for your trip up river. Maybe the man will sell one."

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The man in charge of the little flotilla stood more than six feet tall. His face was intricately cicatrized, and he carried himself with a dignity and reserve that surpassed even the way of the village chiefs.

GRANMAN MOANA YANKUSO

touched the palms of our hands, and struck against the calves three times. 123

"This is obia," he said simply, and when he was finished, he went out. 782
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Our cook knew this obia. It was Opete obia, medicine bearing the name of the sacred buzzard. It was given us that we might have a good journey down the river.

"Did you see how he was careful to touch the eyes?" our cook pointed out to us. "The Opete gets the eyes when it comes to a person, just like Kromanti goes into the head, and Vodou into the belly." [m]

When we went out for a moment, and walked toward our storeroom, we saw the Granman splash water out of a calabash onto the floor and front wall of the house which held our supplies. Was it that our belongings might be safe on our journey down? It was no time for questions, and we asked none.

Women and children again came crowding about the white woman. Though they had been warned not to talk, there was still something of the warm feeling of earlier times which a command did not entirely destroy. Then, too, the order was that the sendoff was to lack no formality. As we stood there, a dog came running down the path. He was on his way to the river. In his mouth was a large ball of something which had been thoroughly charred. It was an offering to the river spirits, perhaps. It might have been less pleasant magic. He had been sent by men who were busy in the ancestral shrine. 123
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When the white woman called attention to the dog, and asked what he held, the women recoiled with amazement that she should have seen the dog at all. Part of the magic might have been, as it was in some formulas we recorded, that he was to pass by invisible to the strangers. But this is conjecture. . . .

The moment before we went down the path to the river, Amasina came up alone, and gave us her hand. She was gracious, and completely at her ease. Whatever was said, she had faith in her god Towenu, who had vouched for our friendship. 123
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REBEL DESTINY

115 him, and what he could get on the Marowyne in a year,
[52] it would be possible for him to see to it that his betrothed
[54] had all the gifts that a man of position gave to his woman.
There were, too, other things to bear in mind. Already
he had seen a girl who would make a desirable second wife,
but that would require still more money.

115 "But, Bayo," we interposed, "we saw your mother at
913 Djamungo. She told us your girl will not be ready for
marrying for some time."

"Did she say that? Did she tell you that I am still a
child?"

"What's the matter, Bayo? Don't you like her?"

"Awa, I like her. Not too much. She likes to talk."

231 We thought it politic to give the subject a new turn.
224 Close beside Bayo lay the dog that had accompanied him
the first time he came to us here, before our journey up
the river. His was a curious color, a faint pinkish hue which
puzzled us.

"What is the color of your dog, Bayo?"

"He is white when he does not have obia on him. He
is a hunting dog. Tross is his name. He will stay with me.
The obia comes off when he goes into the river."

We laughed. "Does Tross hunt in the river, Bayo?"

"No. In the bush. But if I leave him behind, he swims
out to my canoe."

231 Tross was to become better known to us as the days went
189 on. He had a great affection for his master, and this
feeling extended to all those who appertained to Bayo.
After Bayo had attached himself to our camp, we, too,
came under the aura of his dog's regard, though this may
have been made the more reasonable by the fact that the
netting of the mosquito guards of our hammocks appealed
to Tross as a comfortable place to spend the night. He was
a good watchdog, and sometimes we were awakened by his
low growl, and a voice saying "Cho!—Be quiet!" Just
now we were interested in the cord about his neck, and we
asked Bayo about it.

"It is more obia. It is strong, too. Nothing happens to
Tross when he goes in the bush. You will see."

BAYO, THE PLAYBOY

him about it as he came to take the white man through the bush trails to a neighboring village. 302
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One of the girls who admired him had achieved this, but how she had managed to make the minute braids was difficult for us to see, for Bayo's hair the day before, long for him, had not seemed sufficiently yielding to permit of braiding. Yet here he was, his head covered with innumerable small braids which divided the white scalp into sections and showed lines where the many regular parts had been made. This made quite a new man out of Bayo. He was no longer the warrior who went without food because he was bored with the idea of preparing the food—a woman's task or, at best, that of an old man like his great-grandfather Bibifo who had cooked on the up-river trip. Now he was a dandy. [20]
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"Ai-yo!" he crowed back as we speculated on the labor that had gone into the creation. "It took her almost all the night! It is hard work."

"She must like you, Bayo."

"She likes me well, ai!"

"Are you going to have her for your third wife?"

"Who knows? But a man doesn't marry every woman who braids his hair."

Soon Bayo and the white man were off through the bush, Tross going ahead as scout. Back and across the path he would dart and for the white man, unaccustomed to the sounds of the bush, it was difficult to tell whether the rustling he heard was caused by the dog, or by the small animals stirred up from time to time. Once a snake coiled on the path moved lazily away as they approached; Tross had disturbed it, and the snake had no mind for more encounters. Once a small animal of some sort dashed across the trail ahead, the dog in close pursuit, and for some moments we could hear them tearing through the underbrush. 484
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"Aren't you afraid that some animal will hurt Tross, Bayo?"

"He is a good dog. And I have put strong obia on him." [789]

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934

SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca



Bayo and Tross.

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Bow and arrow used for
shooting large fish.

[Facing p. 30]

(Facing page 303)

The Game Trail

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this is bush magic. Around his neck several amulets are²²⁴
hung, one to enable him to find the game, another to keep⁷⁸⁹
him from getting lost, and the third, a small pouch of dried⁷⁷⁸
leaves, to make him shoot well. With these he takes the game
trail behind the village, by the cassava fields where the
women are working.

The trail does not last long; he begins to stalk like a black
shadow through the bush. Overhead, parrots are cackling
noisily, green as the jungle leaves. They eye him suspiciously
as he snakes his way noiselessly through the tangled bush.
In the dim blue jungle light the game is hard to see. But the
Djuka, accustomed to it, approaches the tree where the
parrots are. Some fly away.

Down on his haunches, like a Russian dancer, the hunter
advances in a squatting position until he is directly under-
neath. He holds his gun at arm's length, the stock resting not
on the shoulder but placed in the palm of his left hand,
which is extended in front of him. This is a remnant from
the old flintlock days, when the pans would occasionally
flash back and burn the side of the face, unless the gun were
held practically at arm's length. There is the added ad-
vantage of permitting a quicker movement of the barrel
over a wide arc, especially when the hunter is crouched in
this squatting position. He fires and the body of a parrot
comes tumbling down through the leaves.

Accompanying the Djuka hunter is his highly prized hunt-²²⁴
ing dog—a mangy little terrier. It is stained all over with a²³¹
red nut-juice to lend it prowess in the pursuit of some par-

- 224 ticular animal. The red terrier will not hunt anything else.
 ● 231 It stands now ferociously over the body of the dead parrot, its tongue hanging out, panting.

411 Bows and arrows are as common as shotguns, and preferred by many of the black huntsmen because they make no noise, need no mansanny. The bow is fashioned from one of the South American hardwoods, letterwood or purple-heart. The shaft is tremendously resilient, and strung with [263] *singrassi* it takes a stout arm indeed to bend it. *Singrassi* is a species of grass which is hand-spun into tough cord, by rolling it on the flesh of the thigh. When unflexed, the carved bow is nearly six feet long.

The arrows are made from hollow reeds, and are extremely light and well balanced. Into one end of the reed a foot-long hardwood point is set, wrapped with *singrassi* and gummed. At the other end, the ferrule is similarly set in, the joint again being wrapped around to prevent splitting. Some arrows have metal points filed from old bush-knives. A five-foot arrow like this can be used as a little javelin for spearing small game. The Bush Negroes also use blunt arrows to stun birds.

224 A naked savage stalking through the bush, armed only with a bow and arrow, furnishes a sight of the primitive that is fast disappearing from this commonplace world. The

[534] Djuka calls some of his game, principally the agoutis, by [323] imitating their cries on a little whistle, made out of baked [321] clay or a hollow shell. The imitation is so accurate, in the case of smaller game, as to fool even the jaguar that feeds on

The Game Trail

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moving air, roared like an open steam valve. We are rudely ¹³² awakened by Daniels, who shakes our hammock violently. He shouts over the uproar; everyone must leave the huts at once. A giant tree close to the windward is about to fall and might crush the huts while we sleep.

We quickly abandon the hut and are immediately drenched. Imagine such disconsolate men, staring at the moving wilderness of leaves damning all trees and all weather that takes them out of their hammocks at two o'clock in the morning, and almost reconciled to the idea of being crushed in comfortable hammocks in preference to standing out in the open, expecting a tree to fall on them anyway. But in a short time the storm subsides sufficiently to allow us to return.

The next morning we break camp and trek another day ²²⁴ back into the interior. There are no camps now, no huts of ⁶⁴⁸ any kind, no men. Only the high bush. We make an early start to look for the puma that escaped the night before. There is a bloody bed of sheltered leaves where the puma rested, but the rest of the path is obliterated by the storm.

We turn and begin the trek back.



A curious custom widely prevalent among the Bush Negroes ²²⁴ is that called *Dressy Dahgo*, or dressing the dog, in ⁸²⁵

- 224 other words, preparing a dog in such a manner that it will
 ● 231 be capable of hunting a particular species of game. There are
 225 several methods of accomplishing this. The Negro may grasp the animal between his knees and pour the *dressy* through the nose of the dog. This substance is composed of pieces of the animal which they desire the dog to hunt. Most commonly it is the foot; this is dried and then infused with water. The infusion is also rubbed on the dog's feet. Such preliminaries are usual in hunting peccary.

If the hunter desires to prepare his dog for pursuing the *labba*, a type of water rodent, he cuts the flesh from the nose of the labba and also from its feet, prepares an infusion with water, and then pours this through the dog's nose. Still another method is to mix the hair of the animal which is to be hunted with pepper, and then to rub the dog all over with this mixture.

A fourth way is to feed a piece of the liver of the desired animal to the dog; but it is essential that the liver be placed on a knife, allowing the dog to eat it from that.

- 224 There is an interesting superstition among the Djukas that
 245 anyone who is related to a twin will seriously disrupt a hunting party. On one occasion a large quata, or spider monkey, was sighted by some hunters who, however, failed to bring the animal to earth after fifteen shots. Their ill-luck to the fact that one of the huntsmen "belonged to a tw

Food in the Jungle

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Rice, especially when ripening, is attacked by birds, particularly the parakeets and parrots. These can destroy an entire field in one evening. Sometimes the Djukas are forced to sit up all night with shotguns to scare them off. Weevils and plant diseases are also common.

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They have large sweet potatoes, known as yams, but no white potatoes. Corn, which they call *koru*; okra, or *oko*; and peanuts (*pinda*), form a minor part of the Djuka diet. There are occasional banana and cocoanut trees, and some pineapples and breadfruit. Some few additional nuts and fruits are furnished by the jungle. Palm oil, of which they are excessively fond, is another part of the commissary. No journey is undertaken without a liberal supply. It is obtained by squeezing the nut or fruit of a species of palm, called the *mareepa*. To the white man it tastes like olive oil. Sugar cane is seen in a number of villages, as are domestic fowl. No cattle or swine are to be found. [237]

Thus the Bush Negroes carry on with courage and extreme hardihood under the implacable necessities of life in the enemy jungle, in which the white man has never been able to make his home successfully.



A common sight along the river is a Djuka black, poised on a slippery rock in statuesque immobility, his bow flexed and arrow drawn, shooting for fish.

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B /512 cont. /

R
137 The region is entirely covered by equatorial forest which the
241 inhabitants clear for their crops, practicing a shifting agriculture
on burned-over land.

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311 Life is closely tied to the river, on the edge of which are
504 established villages and crops. They scarcely move except by
368 water. Everybody, man, woman, or child, has his pirogue, and
the children learn to paddle at the same time that they learn to
walk.

B
R
433 The principal activities of the two populations are agriculture,
fishing, and canoeing.

R
262 There is scarcely any difference between the dietary resources
of the Indians and the Boni. The principal portion is manioc,
eaten in the form of cassave (flat cakes cooked on a plate) or of
couac (roasted and granulated flour). Then come tubers, yams,
dasheens, "Carib cabbage" /taro/ and sweet potatoes, bananas
and plantains. The Boni in addition plant mountain rice, from
which the yield is small; in return, they eat fewer bananas.

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[241]
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[226] The protein ration is furnished essentially by fish, eaten
fresh or smoked. The Indians, skillful fishermen, never lack
them. Game furnishes a less regular, but important resource.

B
R
[231] Animal husbandry, confined to a few chickens raised mainly
to sell, represents only an insignificant part of the diet.

[439] The fat from fish and from animals killed while hunting con-
stitutes the principal portion of lipides. The Boni use in addition,
for preparing their meals, a small quantity of maripa palm oil.

Vitamins come from fruit (papaya, pineapple, mangoes),
which the Indians eat in greater abundance than the Blacks, from
wild spinach, rich in Vitamin A, and palm nuts (awara and caumou),
eaten in great abundance during the rainy season.

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R
146 Neither of the two populations is undernourished. The Indians
might have been so temporarily during epidemics, when the adults,
having been sick for a long time, were unable to clear sufficient
land. But they can supplement an inadequate harvest with a great
variety of wild foods that can be gathered.

The diet seems poor in mineral elements and especially in
calcium. Traces of rachitis are noticeable among some of the
Indian children.

6: Hurault--107a K-5 (1948-1958) 1961 SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Boni

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Fig. 15. House type of the Refugee Blacks; Loabi village
(Djuka of the Upper Tapanahoni).